MARCELLE CAHN



SELECTED WORKS

Member of the group "Cercle et Carré", Marcelle Cahn's works from the very first period of her production are linked to expressionism thanks to her expressionist master Lovis Corinth in Berlin, then to cubism by joining the courses of the Modern Academy in the studio of Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant in Paris where she did not go beyond abstraction, proposing a personal style combining geometric rigor and sensitivity; finally she joined purism and constructivism. After the War, she regularly participates in the "Salon des Réalités Nouvelles", where she shows her abstract compositions. It is at this time that she will define the style that characterizes her paintings with white backgrounds crossed by a play of lines or forms in relief, it is also at this time that she realizes her astonishing collages created from everyday supports: envelopes, labels, photographs, postcards, stickers.





Marcelle Cahn (at the center) surrounded by the members of the group "Cercle et Carré" (photograph taken in 1929) : Francisca Clausen, Florence Henri, Manolita Piña de Torres García, Joaquín Torres García, Piet Mondrian, Jean Arp, Pierre Daura, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Michel Seuphor, Friedrich Vordemberge Gildewart, Veraldelson, Luigi Russolo, Nina Kandinsky, Georges Vantongerloo, Vassily Kandinsky and Jean Gorin.



BIOGRAPHY

Born March 1st 1895 at Strasbourg, died September 21st 1981 at Neuilly-sur-Seine

1915-1920 From 1915 to 1919, she lives in Berlin, where she was a student of Lovis Corinth. Her first visit to Paris came in 1920 where she also tries her hand at small geometrical drawings. She is Influenced by Cézanne´s work about whom she said: « For me he remains the most accomplished of modern painters ».

1923 In Zurich she attends philosophy classes. Back to Paris for two months she enters the Ranson Academy where Édouard Vuillard teaches, then she goes to The Modern Academy where Othon Friesz teaches.

1925 She frequents the Academy of « La Grande Chaumière », where she studies nudes, still lifes, drawings, cubist and purist paintings. She meets Léonce Rosenberg, a gallery owner who introduces her to Fernand Léger of the Modern Academy where she starts working first with Fernand Léger himself and then with Amédée Ozenfant. A letter written by Léonce Rosenberg to Fernand Léger can confirm: « Indeed, the two most interesting artists, in my humble opinion, are two women: Miss Clausen and Miss Cahn».

1926 Thanks to her relationships with Marcel Duchamp, she is able to expose a few pieces in New-York, at the exhibition of the Société Anonyme.

1929 She is invited by Michel Seuphor to join the group « Cercle et Carré ». She exhibits her work and becomes acquainted with Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Vantongerloo, Gorin. The same year, she sends four of her paintings to the selective contemporary art exhibition in Amsterdam « The International Exhibition of Economic History in Amsterdam».

1930-39 She retreats from public artistic life. She draws and paints in Strasbourg meanwhile going to Paris for short stays. Her style during this period is based on abstraction, surrealism and sometimes figuration only with essential shapes.

1939-45 Accompanied by her mother she retreats first to Blois (France) then to a monastere near by Toulouse where she frequents local painters and takes philosophy classes, she attends lectures about Christian Faith and Ecumenism. Her mother dies on 19 December 1945 in Toulouse. Marcelle Cahn is deeply upset by the loss. During this period, because of her refugee status and frequent movements, she is not able to paint and focuses on drawing.

1948 Marcelle comes back to the Parisian life through the exhibition « Le Salon des Réalités Nouvelles », she renews her ties with old friends.

1952	She creates linear geometrical drawings and collages. She will then redirect herself toward painting, following the advice of Felix del Marle. She starts adding circular elements made in different materials to bring color to her work.
1953	Her first in-relief and linear works appear.
1955	The year that sees her first collages on photos.
1957 and 58	She is still working on collages and even starts reworking some of her pieces from their photos.
1960	She starts creating what is known as « tableaux-spheres » and « spacial mobiles ».
1961	She tries new supports, like polyptychs with cut panels which allow her to invest a 3D space.
1966	Marcelle Cahn gets a contract with the Parisian gallery Denise René. This agreement is a relief for her even though it won't last long. The gallery faces financial issues in the time that follows.
1966-67	Throughout this year she produces a series of collages on photography, she takes possesion of the space and creates new architectures and structures on the photos.
1969	Due to health issues, she has to move out of her studio and goes to the Galignani foundation (a retirement home for artists in Neuilly, France). She starts creating collages made of envelopes she receives by mail. She sends them back with added details. In parallel, she completely embraces the 3D spaces with the sculptures Spatial A (see p. 31 of this document) and B (see p. 33 of this document) and later Spatial C, these pieces are now part of public collections (Spatial A and B are in the collection of the Pompidou Museum).
1970-71	As the gallery Denis René is not in financial crisis anymore, she renews their partnership wich will last to the end of her life.
1972	Her first Museum exhibition takes place this year in the Centre National d'art contemporain de Paris (CNAC). The museum edited a catalogue for the occasion which was a good opportunity for Marcelle Cahn to reach a wider audience. The museum will exhibit her work again the following year in a group show.
1972-2021	Exhibitions about her work kept going, even after her death in 1981. Her contract with the gallery Denise René gave her a constant display of her pieces during her last years.
1980	The artist made a huge donation to the Musée d'art contemporain de Strasbourg, containing 200 pieces and the elements present in her study. These artworks are still in the museum's collection and can be seen at the occasion of group or solo exhibitions.
2006	An association called « Le cercle des amis de Marcelle Cahn » was founded in Strasbourg. Their aim is to place in the light the huge amount of works she produced and to make them accessible.

CHRONOLOGY

1918-1938 STRASBOURG-PARIS p. 6

1939-1952 SECOND WORLD WAR - POST WAR p. 13

1952-1973 LINEAR PAINTINGS (PEINTURES LINEAIRES) p. 15

1960 - 1973 VOLUME p. 20

1971 - 1973 COLLAGES ON POSTAL CARDS p. 31

1973 - 1981 LAST YEARS p. 36

A DOCUMENTARY FILM p. 41

EXHIBITION VIEWS p. 43

STRASBOURG-PARIS 1918-1938

Between the wars, Marcelle Cahn's meeting with her teachers Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant at the Académie Moderne de Peinture marked her artistic practice and personal development. From 1925 onwards, a break in style is felt: the scenes are more refined and the diagonals give a specific dynamic to the compositions. Marcelle Cahn shares with Léger the idea of sublimation of the painted surface and his conviction that art has the power to transform society, an idea inspired by utopian theories. Music (through the representation of musical instruments) and sports are the privileged themes in the paintings of this period.

During this decisive period, she participated in her first exhibition "L'Art d'Aujourd'hui" in December 1925, which was one of the major exhibitions of the geometric tendencies of the twenties and which brought together a number of purist artists, late cubists, surrealists and constructivists of the main avant-garde currents. Integrated into the art scene, she exhibited in 1927 with the "Société des Artistes Indépendants" and shortly afterwards participated in the meetings of the group "Cercle et Carré", founded by Michel Seuphor and bringing together all the abstract artists, and among the non-abstract, all the geometric and constructive artists.

From 1936 onwards, Marcelle Cahn gradually moves away from the artistic scene. The major elements that make up her artistic vocabulary afterwards are already in place and will become more and more important: the circle and the sphere.



Marcelle Cahn

Autoportrait, ca. 1921

Graphite on paper, 16.5 x 13 cm

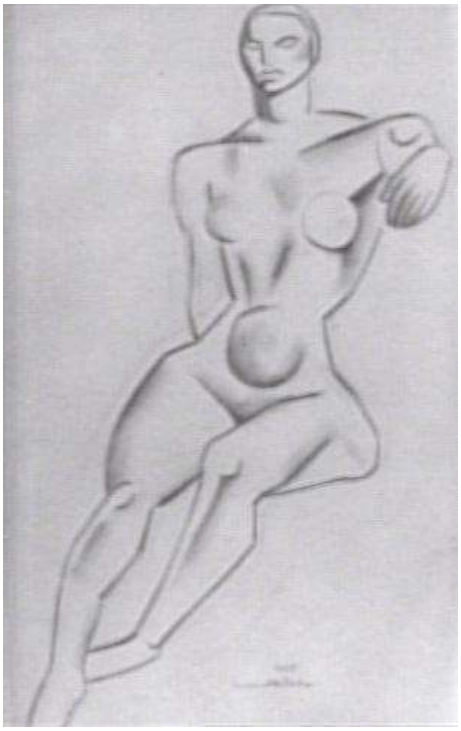
Signed frontside at the bottom, right : M. Cahn

Signed frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn

« The self-portrait delivers the intimacy of the artist. The light models this face in search of the most accurate expression that can translate all that this self-portrait wants to affirm. The shadows are modulated by the rubbing of the finger on the pencil line considered too dry. The contour lines are sharp, precise. The writing is tight, as are the lips. The closed mouth, tiny, contributes with the voluntary, provocative and scrutinizing look, to the tense expression of the face. The style of this drawing is close to those of Foujita and in particular to the drawing with pen and gouache of *Two Asian heads* (see R. Cogniat, Dessins et aquarelles du XXe siècle, Paris, 1966, p. 129). »

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M. (1995) *Marcelle Cahn, sa vie - son œuvre (Catalogue raisonné),* PhD thesis, Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg (unpublished) VOL. II, p. 27.

Collection of CNAP (Centre national des arts plastiques), Paris



Marcelle Cahn

Nu, 1925

Graphite , 32.6 x 20.3 cm

Signed and dated frontside at the bottom, right : 1925, Marcelle Cahn

« Placed in front, in perspective and diagonally on the page, this seated nude is treated largely by geometric volumes. The shoulders are horizontally placed, characteristic of Marcelle Cahn's art. As in some of her paintings, the eyes have no gaze. Here, this effect serves to reinforce the impact of the model. The rendering of the stature and the power of the model make it a drawing of the first rank ».

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.,* VOL. II, p. 57

Collection MNAM (Musée National d'art moderne), Centre Pompidou, Paris



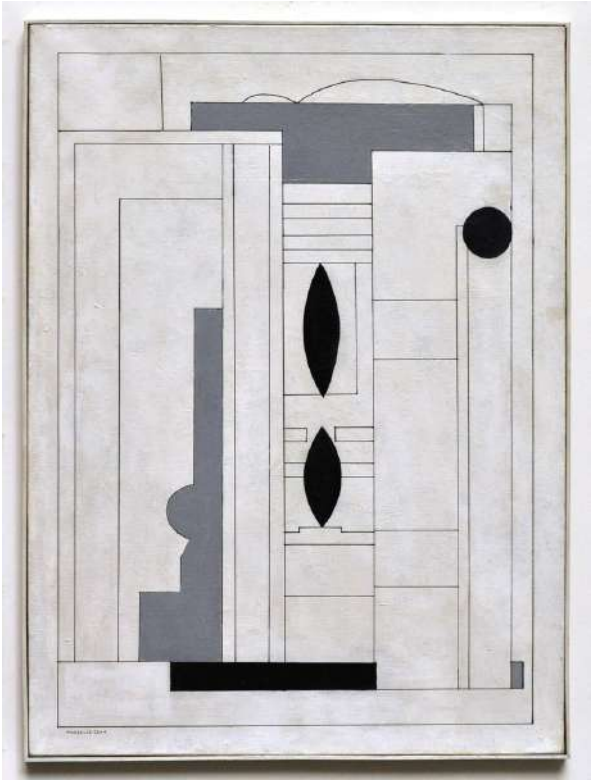
Marcelle Cahn
Composition abstraite, 1925
Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 54 x 2.3 cm
Signed at the bottom, right: "MARCELLE CAHN"

Collection: Musée Coleção Berardo

This painting has been considered by critics as Marcelle Cahn's first abstract composition. This is due to the fact that it was shown in retrospective solo exhibitions and that it was exhibited in 1925 at « Art d'Aujourd'hui » (Cat. Rais. nn. 38 and 142).

Executed in Fernand Léger's studio, it falls into the category of Pure Plastic works, i.e. stripped of the influence of surrounding life, according to the definition given at the time to these geometric compositions by the artisans of a new aesthetic around Léger and the Stijl. In this composition with red, ochre-yellow, beige and green colors, the white ensures the luminosity. The black has the value of a call, of tightening and serves to the stability of the greys which, placed in the frame of the periphery, maintain the colored tensions in the center and ensure a total stability. The strength of this painting is largely due to the color which is not far from the "violent" color of Léger that Marcelle Cahn appreciates a lot.

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 50



Marcelle Cahn

Composition puriste ou Le Tram, ca. 1925

Oil on canvas, 73 x 54 cm

Signed and titled frontside at the bottom, left

Collection MNAM (Musée National d'art moderne), Centre Pompidou

> « Identical in composition and format to the previous canvas *(Composition Abstraite, 1925)*, this variation plays on the occupation of space in a concern for purity and maximum simplicity. On the white canvas, only seven black and gray spaces appear in a network of lines without diagonals. The title "Tram" comes from the two curved lines at the top, which evoke the electric lines of the tramways ».
>
> Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 51

Provenance
Galerie Jocelyn Wolff



Marcelle Cahn
Femme et voilier, ca. 1926-1927
Oil on canvas, 66 x 50 cm
Signed at the bottom, right : MARCELLE CAHN

Collection Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la Ville de Strasbourg

« In this painting, there is not only a sailboat, even if the central one is strongly present in the form of a clear triangle on which a woman stands out. There is a whole maritime activity in the background with the passage of a large ship. It forms a clear contrast in its treatment, but without opposition in its symbolism, with the ample female figure inscribed in a pure geometric form almost solely by a contour line. This supple breadth of the body and its inscription in a strongly structured space is not unlike Juan Gris. Analyzing this painting, N. Lehni writes: « Marcelle Cahn has sought to master and balance the linear rhythms of the contours of a body, a sailboat and an ocean liner (motifs that are superimposed by transparency and which are initially pretexts for combinations of circles, triangles and rectangles). The ample curves of the woman could be an inflated sail or the hull of a sailboat; her breasts respond to the portholes of the liner ». (N.Lehni, Les modernes, op.cit., p. 67.) ». Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M. (1995), *op. cit.,* VOL II, p. 80



Marcelle Cahn
Ascendance, 1936
Oil on wood, 48 x 36 cm

Collection Musée d´art moderne et contemporain de la Ville de Strasbourg

« En 1935, le corps humain occupe toujours une place privilégiée, mais la présence de dessins abstraits trouvés dans des collections particulières permet de s'interroger. Revient-elle a une expression abstraite à ce moment-là, ou ne l'a-t-elle jamais totalement abandonnée? 1936 est l'année des dessins de chats, de natures-mortes aux pommes, mais aussi celle d'une peinture nommée A*scendance* non localisée. Son titre laisse supposer un retour à l'abstraction, alors que Marcelle Cahn dit à Daniel Abadie que c'est en 1939 qu'elle refait une peinture abstraite. (…).

Marcelle Cahn s'intègre parfaitement et profondément dans l'histoire l'art occidental de ce siècle, l'art face à la crise, crise qui va de 1929 à 1939[1]. Elle se retire de la scène artistique, non seulement pour s'écarter des vaines querelles des groupes d'avant-garde, mais surtout pour faire la somme des expériences éprouvées et parvenir à une synthèse personnelle. Son écart volontaire durant ces années peut être compris aussi comme la désillusion du discours collectiviste de la décennie qui a suivi la Révolution russe, espérant "non seulement un changement dans 1 'ordre du politique, mais une transformation structurelle de la société, des mentalités et des modes de vie[2] ».

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.*, VOL. II, p. 93.

[1] L'art face à la crise. L´art en Occident 1929-1939, Travaux XXVI, Université de St-Etienne, CIEREC, 1980.
[2] LAUDE (J.), "La crise de l'humanisme et la fin des utopies", L'art face à la crise … ., p.353.

SECOND WORLD WAR - POST WAR 1939-1952

During these war years, Marcelle Cahn, accompanied by her mother, found refuge in the Toulouse region in a monastery. Then in 1946, the artist returned to Paris. She resumed contact with her old affinities and renewed new ones. Jean Arp, Michel Seuphor and Sonia Delaunay were among them. Few of her works have been recorded during this period, nevertheless she remains active.

During the fifties, Marcelle Cahn exhibited extensively - in the Breteau, Voyelles, Creuze, Suzanne Michel, Arnaud, Simone Heller, Charpentier and Colette Allendy galleries.

COLETTE ALLENDY GALLERY

The Colette Allendy Gallery, at 67 rue de l'Assomption in Paris, was at that time a major place in the post-war avant-garde art scene. Colette Allendy presented group exhibitions such as "Le Cubisme et l'Art concret" (Arp, Kandisky, ...), the "HWPSMTB" group (Hartung, Wols, Picabia, Sthaly, Mathieu, Tapies, Bryen), or the first exhibitions of Yves Klein. Personal exhibitions were also organized by Colette Allendy, including those of Marcelle Cahn, Colette Brunschwig and Sonia Delaunay.

Alongside the artists who collaborated with her, Marcelle Cahn also signed the tribute addressed to the gallery owner, during the exhibition (in May-June 1960) organised in her memory after her death (500 copies).



Colette Allendy in front of her gallery, Paris, 1957
Photo : © All rights reserved



At Colette Allendy Gallery, in Paris, beginning 1950s
Source : fund Galerie Colette Allendy/IMEC. © Margo Friters-Drucker.



Colette Allendy
Source : Portrait published in *Hommage à Colette Allendy,* 1960s (published on the occasion of the exhibition, May-July 1960, dedicated to Colette Allendy after her death, printed in 500 copies

LINEAR PAINTINGS (PEINTURES LINEAIRES) 1952-1973

The year 1952 marked the beginning of an era devoted to works - known as « linear paintings » (peintures linéaires) - characterized by their white background, their linear and geometric forms where disks (or spheres) in relief take their place, interrupting the flat surface of the painting opening to a constructed and sculptural third dimension.

« If I drew linear forms, it is, I think, a purist form of geometric abstraction: the line is the purest, most absolute thing there is; and it is finally it that dominates me »[3].

According to Marie Louise Syring: « When Marcelle Cahn decided to paint large format paintings again, she prepared a white background for her lines. Most of the time she painted on wood, isorel or chipboard. The white, like the line, found an explanation in her desire for purity. She perceived this color as a virgin background, in which she intervened brutally. Sometimes the white represented the open space and its infinities where the cosmos was symbolized and which she could thus fill. Thus, she built what she called her imaginary "architectural universe", in analogy with the real cosmos » [4].

The stake seems to be that of a metaphysical quest; Marcelle Cahn, in her linear and relief paintings, seems indeed to want to say, according to the analysis of Syring « that the spiritual and the conceptual can be objectified only in a totally abstract language. The purity of the forms, the clearness of the lines, the universal and objective validity of the constructions were and remained, for her, ideal representations » [5].

This period is also marked by the « revelation » of collage.

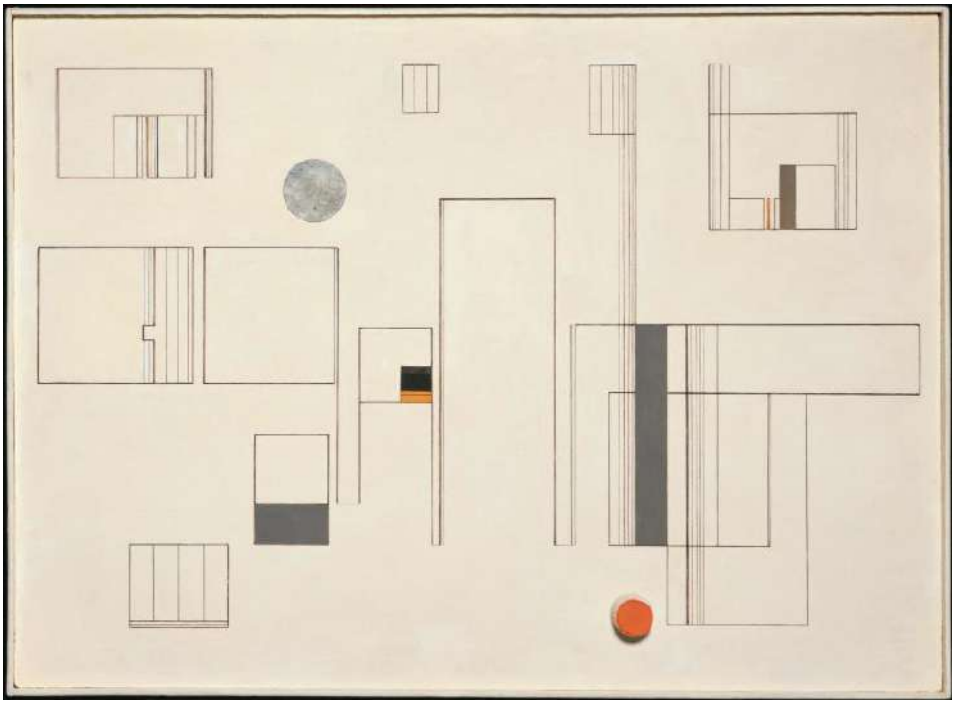
Mireille Cordonnier-Kraft notes in this regard that « in the 1950s, following exhibitions organized by Herta Wescher, collage is considered a means of subversive and constructive action. It is one of the most active elements in the fight against the outdated traditions and contributes positively to the formation of new concepts » [6].

As Marcelle Cahn herself suggests in her autobiography, the practice of collage dates back to her first artistic experiences « I had made one or two in the past, in a cubist spirit in 1925. My arrival to collage is therefore late, but it was, in short, a revelation to be able to express quickly with different materials »[7]

Nevertheless, it is in this period, probably inspired by the notion of relief and by the opening of the painting to three-dimensionality, that Marcelle Cahn develops the gesture of collage and "layering" on all sorts of supports: paper, cardboard, very varied as well as on canvases as on everyday objects (medicine boxes, labels, envelopes, postcards). This method allows him to be fast and to let his improvisation run wild.

Her practice of collage thus evolved during the course of his production and initiated the spatialization that characterizes his works - from painting-reliefs to sculptures - from the 1960s.

3 CAHN Marcelle, Autobiographie, Archives de l'Art Contemporain, n. 21, 1972
4 SYRING M.L., « Préface », dans *Marcelle Cahn : Peintures, collages,* Galerie Lahumière, Paris, 1997
5 *Ibid.*
6 Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.,* VOL. II, page 149
7 CAHN Marcelle, Autobiographie, *op. cit.*



Marcelle Cahn

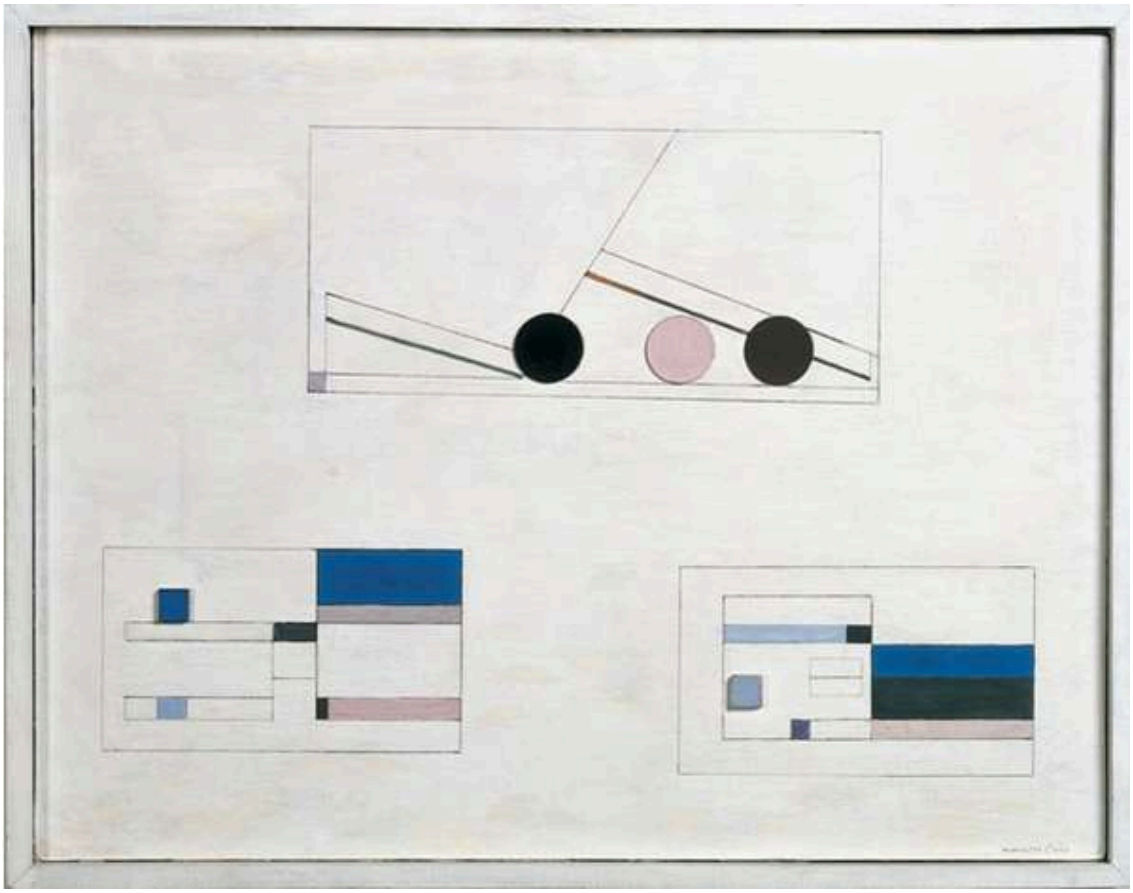
Abstrait linéaire, 1954

Vinyl, gouache and ink on isorel, collage cardboard, balsa, metal, 72.7 x 100 cm

Collection du Musée national d'art moderne, Paris

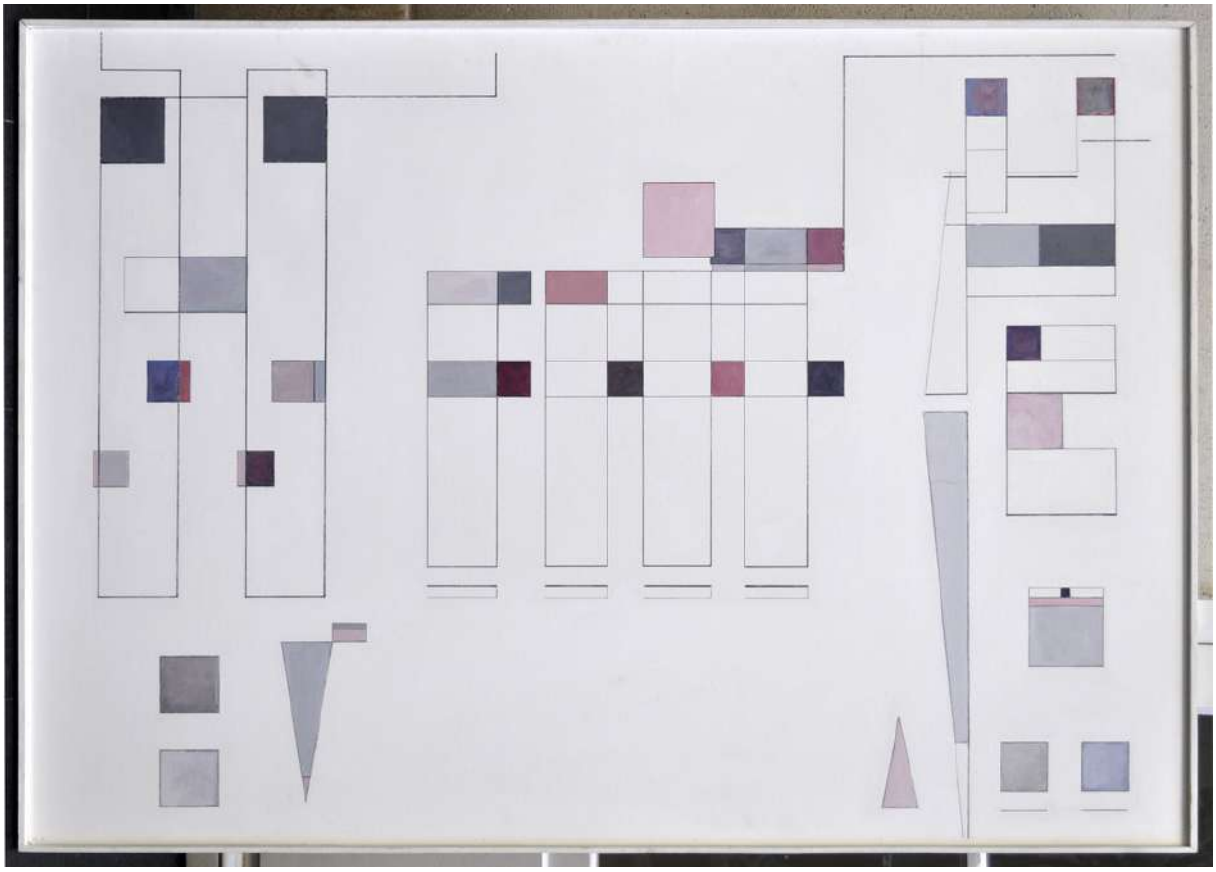
« H. Seckel in her article "La donation Seuphor", takes up what Marcelle Cahn says about this period of linear abstraction in her autobiography and she adds that "on the white background strictly respecting the two-dimensionality of the support, a series of networks of lines closed on themselves or connected to each other, are organized, which give rhythm to the surface and call for a reading, a deciphering, as one would do with a musical score" ».

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.,* VOL II, p. 161



Marcelle Cahn
Disque rose, 1957
Tempera on wood and collage, 50 x 65 cm
Signed and dated frontside at the bottom, right : Marcelle Cahn

Collection CNAP (Centre national des arts plastiques), Paris



Marcelle Cahn

Variation horizontale , 1964-1972

Oil on wood, 114 x 162 cm

Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

« Composed identically to Two Spheres, but without the spheres, this painting is curiously large in size. By the date given, it would have been finished at the Galignani Foundation. Marcelle Cahn room was not very large (…) and therefore this painting should have been seen by people visiting Marcelle Cahn. The closest and most likely to have a precise memory, since she followed closely what her friend was doing and even retouched the damaged paintings, the painter Marianne Fayol does not remember this one at all, underlining also that the format could not let it go unnoticed. It is possible that it is a multiple, like the paintings made in 1966 ».

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.,* VOL II, p. 209

Exhibition History (selection)

1990 - Galerie Franka Berndt, Paris
2020 - Le Plan Libre, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville

DENISE RENE GALLERY

In 1966, Marcelle Cahn begins a collaboration with the Parisian gallery Denise René. This agreement is a relief for her, even if it will not last long. The gallery had to face financial problems in the following time. In the 1970s, the Denis René Gallery was no longer in financial crisis and thus renewed their partnership, which would last until the end of his life. Among his personal exhibitions, « M.C. Œuvres de 1915 à 1975 » (1975).

Denise René was one of the Parisian gallery owners whose exhibitions were oriented towards geometric abstraction. Many avant-garde artists frequented the gallery such as Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Auguste Herbin, Alberto Mangelli, Marcelle Cahn and Victor Vasarely. A pioneer in abstract art, the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou devoted an exhibition to her in 2001 « Denise René, l'intrépide. Une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait (Denise René, the Intrepid. A Gallery in the Adventure of Abstract aArt) ».



Denise René
Source : Galerie Denise René website (https://www.deniserene.fr/denise-rené/)



Galerie Denise René, Rive gauche
Source : undesignable.eu/denise-rene-a-st-germain-des-pres-une-page-se-tourne/

VOLUME
1960 - 1973

From the sixties onwards, volume gradually imposed itself. In 1961, his first « Spatial » appears: a sculpture that translates its linear structures and collages by its volume. Made from materials from everyday life and ephemeral, this series of « Spatials » with cut sides and reliefs reflect the fragility of the space invested. This series of works echoes, by the chosen name, the manifesto « The Spatialists » by Lucio Fontana.

The relief also takes shape in her collages. In her autobiography, she recalls the first photographic collages she made at that time: « Then it became something else for me: by sticking reliefs on a painting we arrive at a new painting, which is like a family, all my things are parts of families, but each one is totally transposed because of the relief. The photo doesn't count much anymore, it becomes something else » [8]. With a great mastery of the medium, Marcelle Cahn reappropriates the elaboration of an autonomous plastic space and experiments with new tensions through this practice. She produced many layered works in 1966 and 1967.

It is also in this decade, at the end of the sixties, that she begins her collages on envelopes. The use of this everyday object brings her artistic gesture closer to that of the Dadaists. The envelope converges the emotions and the memory of a moment and is thus inscribed in time by its function. By revealing the structure of the envelope that she opens, deconstructs and restructures, she reappropriates this codified and symbolic object of the social bond.

In continuity with this singular work, she realized a few years later a series of collages on postcards.

8 CAHN Marcelle, Autobiographie, *op. cit.* quoted in Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.,* VOL. II, p. 222



Marcelle Cahn,

XIXe, 1961

Acrylique and mixed media on wood, 51.4 x 74 x 6 cm

Signed and dated back side

Courtesy galerie Jocelyn Wolff

Exhibition history (selection)

1964 - "M.C.", Galerie Bellechasse, Paris
1975 - "M.C.", Galerie Denise René, Paris
1978 - "Hommage à Sophie Tauber-Arp et Marcelle Cahn", 34ème Salon de l'UFPS, Paris
2018 - « Femmes Années 50. Au fil de l'abstraction, peinture et sculpture », Musée Soulages, Rodez



Marcelle Cahn,

Spatial mobile, 1967-1968

Oil on wood, 69 x 43 x 15.5 cm

Private Collection

Provenance Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

This variation of the first spatial of 1961, with its aspect of mobility voluntarily underlined by the artist in the title it gives it, no longer possesses some of the qualities inherent in the first work. Fragility is absent, the aspect of sacred object provided by the small format of the original no longer exists. But this spatial invades the space, deploys itself in all its luminosity and balance.

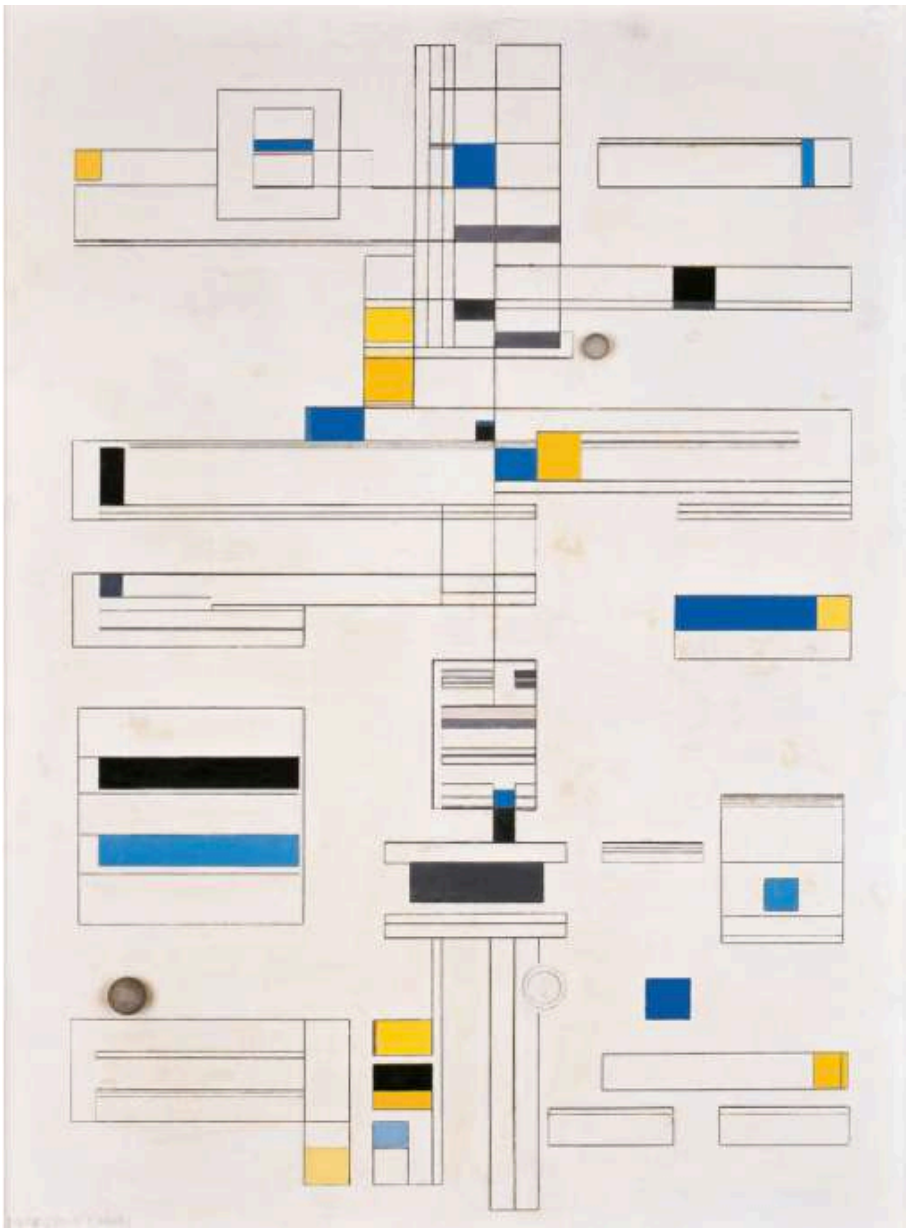
Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.*, VOL II, p. 265

Exhibition history (selection)

1971 - Chemins de la création, Chateau d'Ancy-le-Franc, France

2020 - Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville

2021 - Kunstmuseum Stuttgart



Marcelle Cahn

Tension verticale, ca. 1961

Gouache on wood and glued elements, 100 x 73 cm

Signed frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn

Collection Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la Ville de Strasbourg



Marcelle Cahn
Lolo avec disque rose, 1966 ca.
Collage on photograph, 16.4 x 24 cm
Signed frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn

Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

« There have been several versions of the Lolo painting and several collages on photographs of this painting. The precise date given for this collage certainly indicates that it came out of her studio immediately. Marcelle Cahn being close to Latin American artists, one can think that the title Lolo refers to the artist Lolo Solodiva who stayed in Paris ».

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M., *op. cit.*, VOL II, p. 224

« It was in 1955 that she made her first photographic collage (…). With these collages, she reappropriates the elaboration of an autonomous plastic space, the vibration of colors in it, the experimentation and the discovery of new tensions.
Marcelle Cahn transforms these surfaces dominated by the grey of the glossy paper, this grey which, as Paul Klee defined it, is "without resonance and immobile". She reintroduces color, new forms and, gouache, pencil, autonomous papers.
The photograph as an object no longer exists. Its surface, which was only a reflection, becomes a milky and silvery shadow, support to the quick interpretation of a spiritual and poetic universe, powerfully structured and always renewed. It remains however memory and these collages on photographs pose the question of the perception, the sensation, of what is one and multiple, of the innate and the acquired. One could wonder about the different meanings of the notion of family link that the artist evokes, "all my things are families, but each one is totally transposed".

> In the detour of photographs from his painting, it is the non-fixity that prevails, what Edouard Roditi has called his concern for the indefinite. It is this paradoxical presence-absence which also underlies his personal life ».
>
> *Ibid.,* p. 221

Exhibition History (selection)

2020 - Le Plan libre, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville

Literature

Roditi (E.), « Le souci de l'indéfini », *L'Archie,* n°300, Paris, mars 1982, pp. 103-107



Marcelle Cahn
Sans titre, 1966
Collage on photograph, 16.5 x 21.5 cm
Signed and dated backside

Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

Exhibition History (selection)

2021 - Pop/Op, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville



Marcelle Cahn
Sans titre n° 40 , 1967
Collage, mixed media on paper, 14 x 11.5 cm
Signed backside at the bottom, right

Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

Exhibition History (selection)

2020 - Le Plan libre, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville



Marcelle Cahn
Spatial A, 1969
Relief in polychrome painted wood, 90.5 x 40 x 19 cm
Signed and dated under the base: « Spatial A 1969 Marcelle Cahn »

Collection MNAM (Muséé National d´art moderne) Centre Pompidou, Paris

« The designation by the term "spatial" of a three-dimensional object is characteristic of Marcelle Cahn's approach. The collage-relief, which she has been practicing for a long time, finally detached from the support of the flat surface, joins, by its name, the "temptation of the space", space of the painter obviously but also cosmic space which underlay all her activity. This denomination "spatial" evokes Lucio Fontana and his manifesto The Spatialists[9]. In this one, he says that art is eternal but not immortal. The material object always ends up disappearing, it is the creative gesture which is eternal; it lasts and thus puts the art and the science on an equal footing. The researches of Marcelle Cahn go in the direction of this manifesto.

She is not concerned with the durability of her spaces: they are built in fragile materials. What is important for her is not to find the most suitable material to go through time, the one that gives the

9 FONTANA Lucio, *Les Spatialistes,* manifesto dated 1947, re-edited in the catalogue of the exhibition *qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne ?* , MNAM, Paris, 1986, pp. 373-374.

illusion of immortality, like bronze, but to give an account of the fragility of the conquered space.

The light, which clings to the lateral "wings" of his first space, creates purely fictitious and constantly changing construction lines. Life is born from these imperceptible movements on painted cardboard, which, by its very nature, already bears the imprint of time. These spaces, made from ephemeral and everyday objects: cardboard, paper, medicine boxes, medical light bulb holders, find in their conception, the futurist ideology that exalted the ephemeral and advocated a sculpture « in close relationship with the fleeting and hectic nature of modern life »[10].

Source : Cordonnier-Kraft, M. *op. cit.,* VOL II, p. 185

10 ROWELL Margit, « Cubisme, futurisme », catalogue de l'exposition qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne ?, MNAM, Paris, 1986, p. 28.



Marcelle Cahn
Spatial B, 1963
Relief in painted wood polychrome on metal rod, 106 x 42 x 17 cm

Collection MNAM (Musée National d´art moderne) Centre Pompidou, Paris

COLLAGES ON POSTAL CARDS 1971-1973

When do the first collages on post cards date back to? Certainly a little before 1972, because it was then that Renée Boullier gave Marcelle Cahn a series of cards from a charity sale organised in Meudon. That year, Marcelle Cahn also produced a series covering the sites of the town of Dijon, as part of her exhibition at the museum, organised by the CNAC. In the catalogue notice, Marie-Pierre Allexant wrote that, by using the same procedure as for her collages on photos, « Marcelle Cahn has recently started using all her impertinence to exploit architecture, and colours, and the atmosphere of banal postal cards: she makes the noblest monuments smile or wink, just like the commonest buildings; without being at all gratuitous, because an ambitious and legitimate dream is being expressed - that of giving the cityscape a marvellous aspect, whose lack she deplores and which she places modestly in our imagination ».

It is also this marvellous aspect which Michel Seuphor emphasised, while thanking his friend: « Thank you, dear Marcelle, for your beautiful card. With you, Paris sings and joy reigns over the banks of the Seine. A soundless joy, but solid, deep, serene…».

At the end of her life, Marcelle Cahn corresponded with her friends using postal cards, and Michel Seuphor, who received some of them, said: « It's marvellous being able to play like that. For me, they are works. Minor works, but still works ».

In 1973, Seuphor made the first and only analysis of this particular production. He had written to his friend: « With your postal cards, joy always enters my home. […] I have the impression that you're doing this better and better. Two are particularly surprising: the fishing and the dark barges with small and large white circles […]. These really are works and, no doubt, among the most original ones of these times. Pop and Op remain voiceless compared to your inventions ».

If Michel Seuphor saw these collages as some of the most original productions of the day, it is because they established a junction between optical art and pop art. Sure enough, these postal cards are all about perception and optical and psychological processes, set in a dialectic with modern technology, from which widespread distribution derived. But they also question mass communication and the production of images that is concerned.

« When you make a card like that, you take everything, » she explained to Pierre Gisling. «Depict to yourself what this view over Paris is. It's a marvel, isn't it? And a postal card degrades it, it becomes an image, not a naïve image, but an image which is already extremely clichéd…».

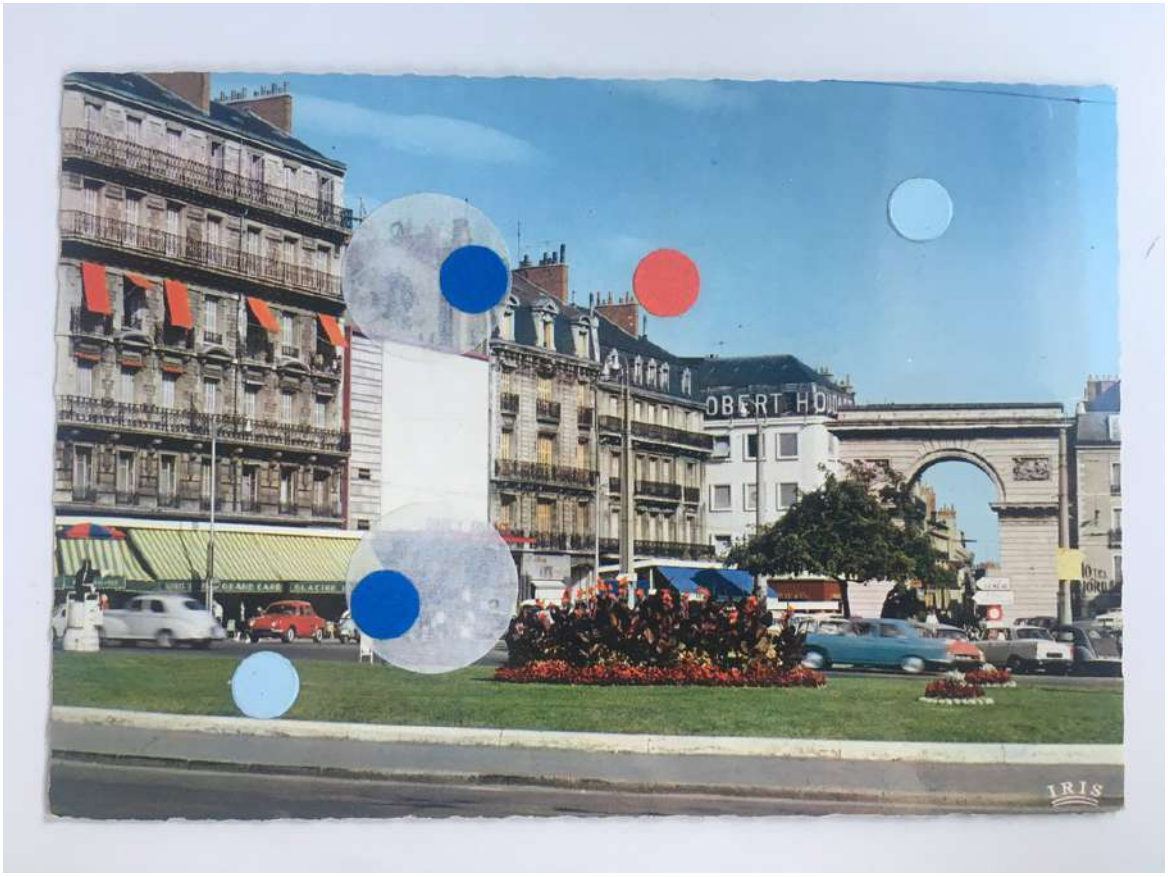
Her postal cards show the distance there can be between an «already extremely clichéd» image, as she put it, between what is apparently real and what is apparently imaginary. It is this ambiguity, this gap which is opened up between what is and what is not, what is possible and what is not, which creates emotion and the liberating humour which is specific to this artist. It is close to that of Marcel Duchamp. She penetrates with humour the fixed world of the pre-established memory-image, offering her view of a site which is frozen in the common mind. This is her mark, her signature in a world which, for an instant, can be seen otherwise than how it is, if you have a few resources. « How beautiful La Place d'Italie is, dear Marcelle, with this yellow, green and white monument! Thanks to you, Paris becomes once again a city full of yellow, luminous, surprisingly fresh and gay sites. We are going to be able to live there again. Thank you! » Seuphor wrote to her.

By appropriating the standardised images of mass communication used in a generally friendly context of exchanges, she expressed how, all her life, she had sought to avoid the traps of established social orders.

She provokes an emotion by showing, with a sometimes tiny alteration, a well-known subject and the modification she has made to it, while still leaving the subject completely recognisable. At the same time, she prevents the normal functioning of perception by placing a question mark over the notions of depiction and resemblance. The image then slips into different times: it moves away from reality or from what is commonly thus termed and, as though transparently, in a reflection, it becomes something else through this

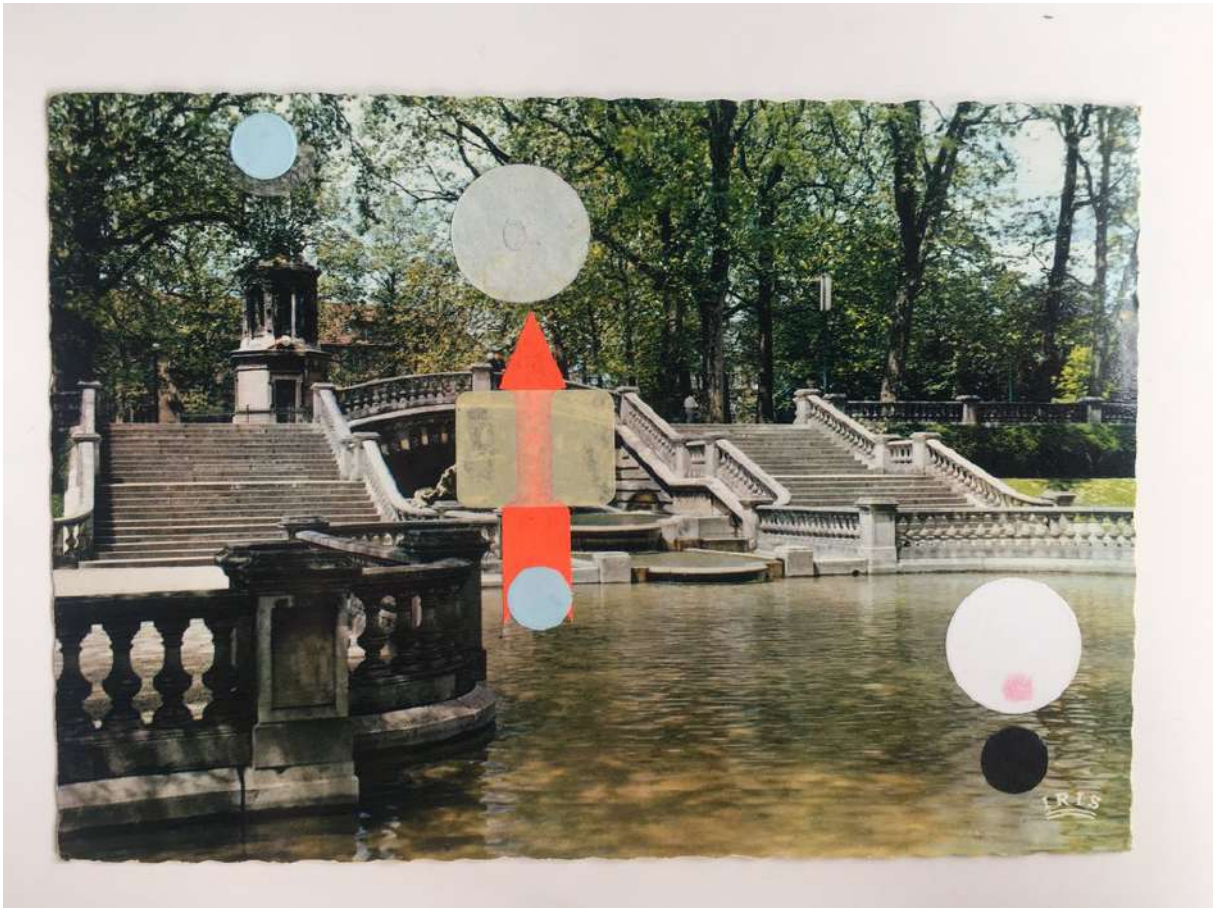
juxtaposition. Marcelle Cahn had a view of the world which is at once amused and rigorous, and she offers anyone who looks at her postal cards a simultaneous vision of a subject and of its two possible representations: the commonly accepted one, and hers. Vision is disturbed because, as in an echo, there appear both the established representation as if it were something admirable, and its transformation thanks to the intervention of a few coloured elements which give it a troubling resonance.

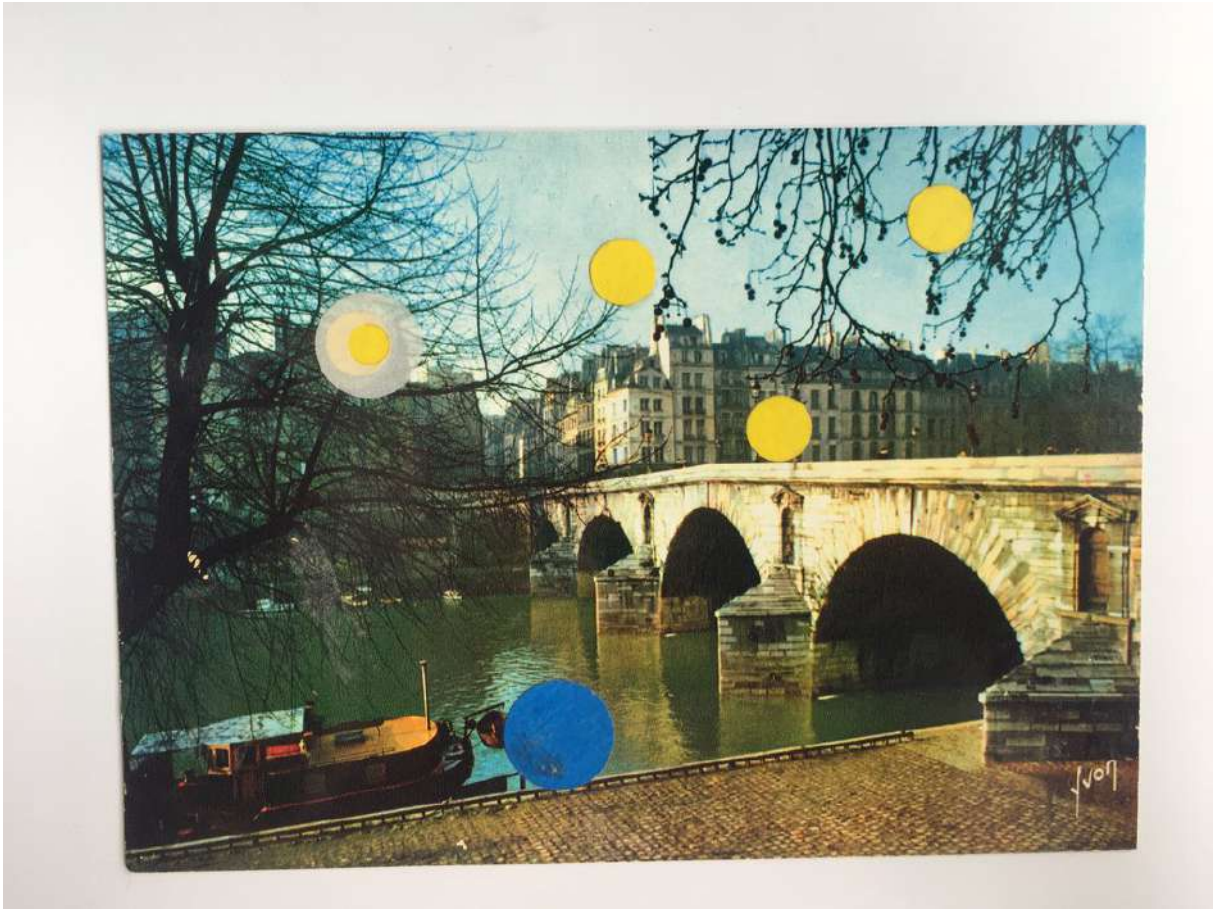
Selection of collages on postal cards, each without title, dated 1971-1973, 10 x 15 cm






IRIS

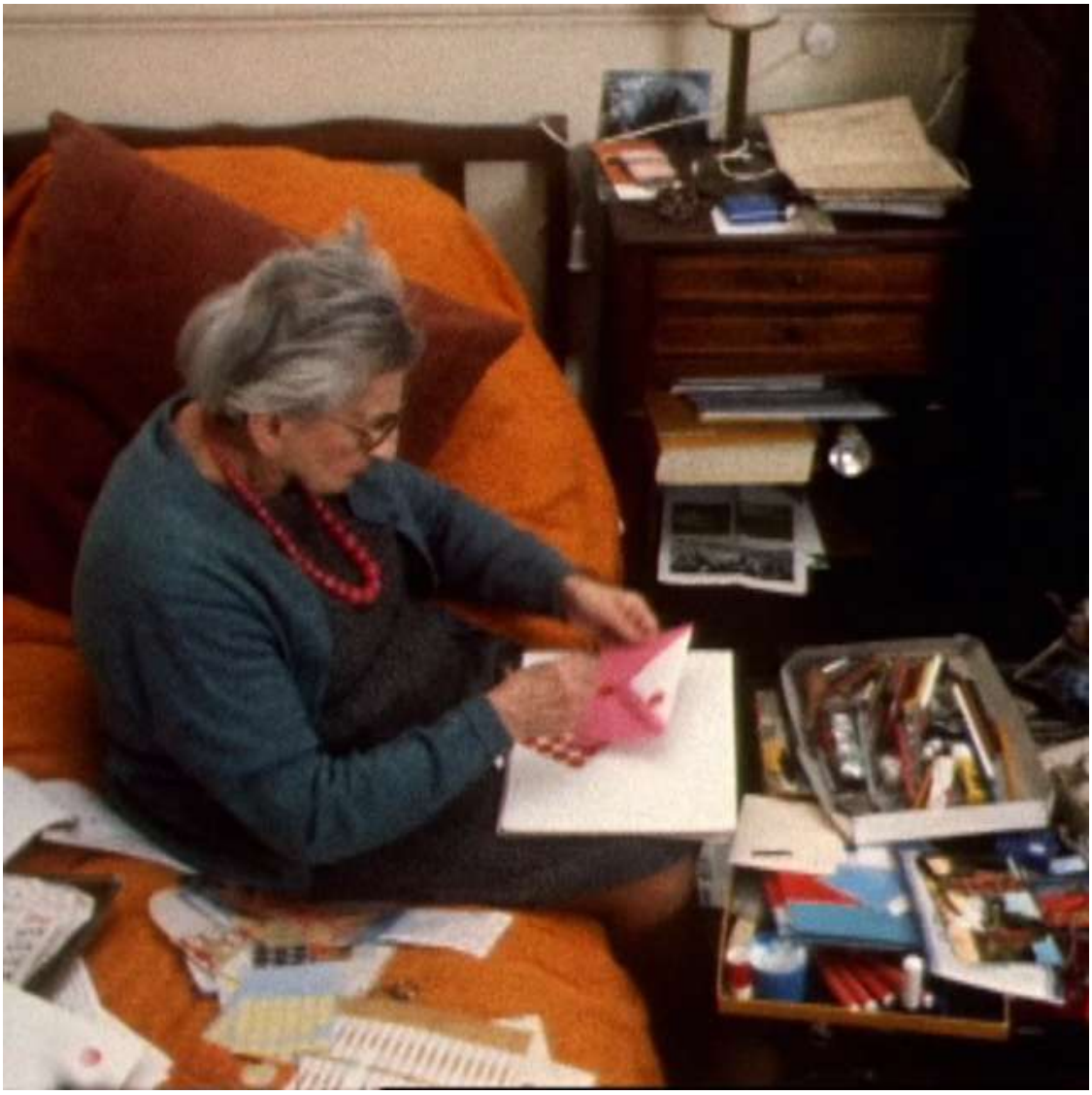

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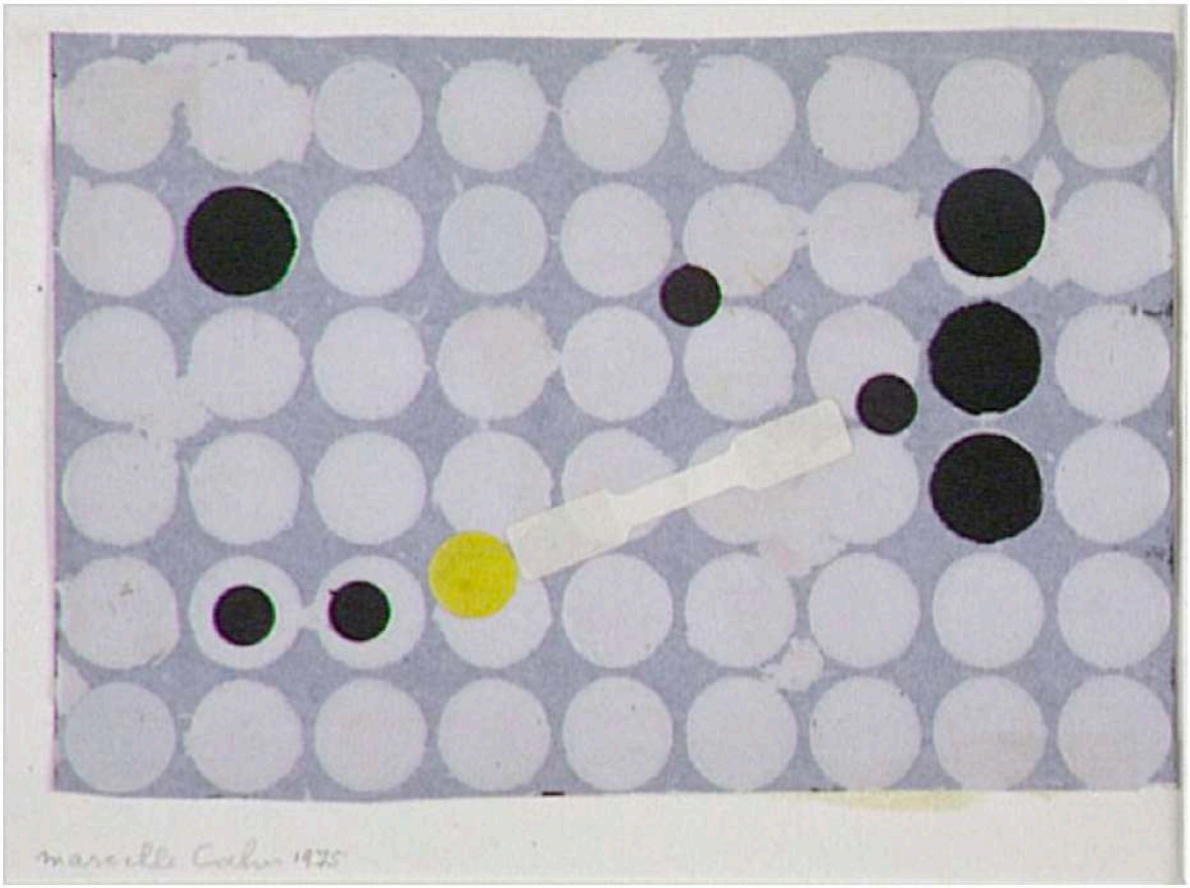


LAST YEARS
1973 - 1981

The last years of Marcelle Cahn's life are always dedicated to her work and her creations. Marked by sobriety, her room at the Galignani Foundation is her studio and the objects she owns are all useful for her work.
From an advanced age, she is no longer able to paint but she continues to create through her collages. Inspired by the material she found, she continued her collages on silkscreens, postcards and envelopes.

She died in 1981, in Neuilly.





Marcelle Cahn
Composition non figurative, 1975
Collage of stickers and labels on a sticker holder with prints glued on a white cardboard sheet, 46.8 x 27.9 cm
Signed frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn 1975

Collection Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la ville de Strasbourg



Marcelle Cahn
Composition non figurative, 1976
Collage on envelope, 22 x 11 cm
Signed frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn 1976

Collection Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la ville de Strasbourg



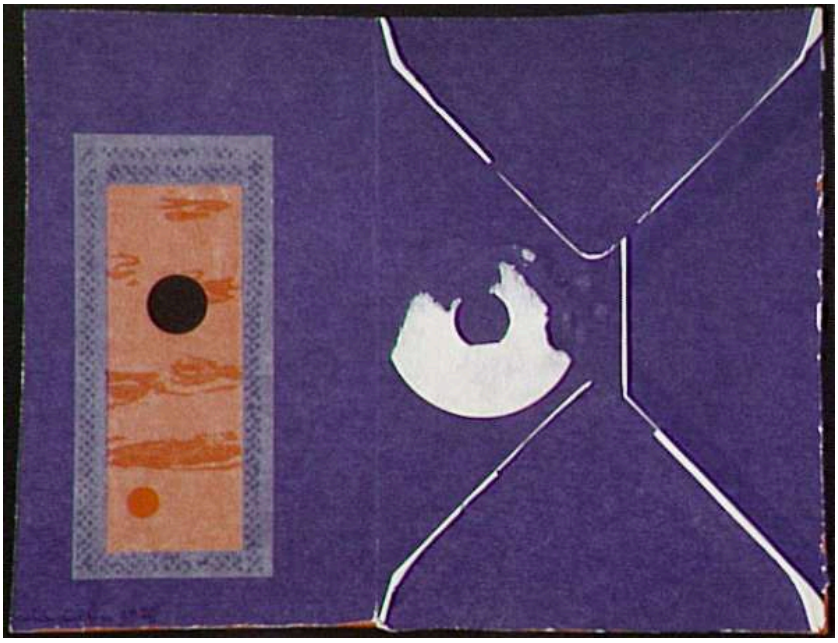
Marcelle Cahn

Lesswi swannswi swave , 1976
Collage, ink and mixed media on paper, 26.7 x 40.7 cm
Signed and dated frontside at the bottom, right

Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

Exhibition History (selection)

2020 - Le Plan libre, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville



Marcelle Cahn
Composition non figurative, 1976
Collage on envelope, 20.8 x 16 cm
Signed and dated frontside at the bottom, left : Marcelle Cahn 1976

Collection Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la ville de Strasbourg

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

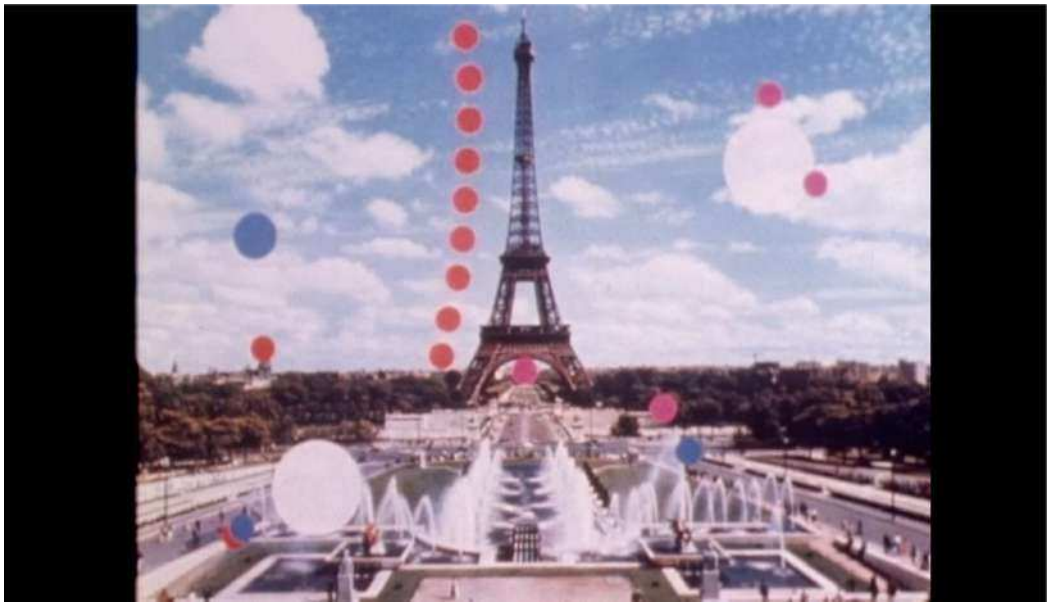
« Clés du regard »

Radio Télévision Suisse, May 13,1976

Journalist : Pierre Gisling. Director : Louis Barby

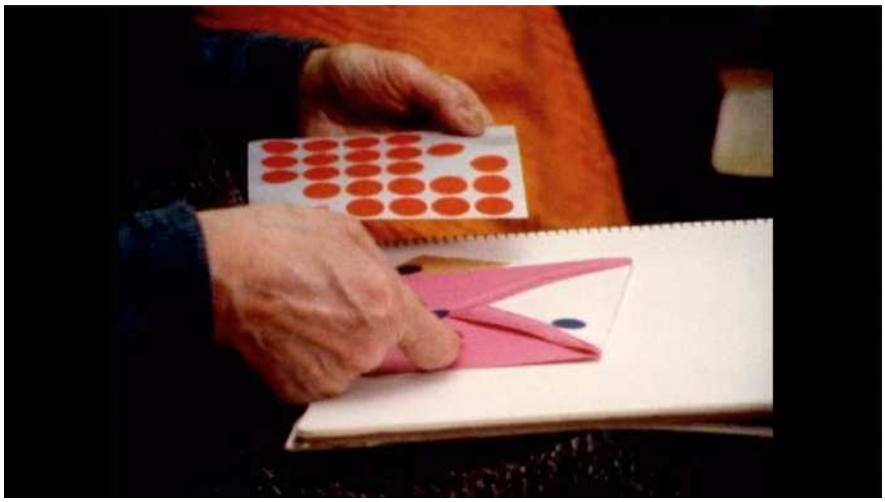
The video (with English subtitles) is available on our website : www.galeriewolff.com

Screenshots:











EXHIBITION VIEWS

LE PLAN LIBRE

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville

Group show with ISMAIL BAHRI, MARCELLE CAHN, HESSIE, IRENE KOPELMAN, GEORGES KOSKAS, GUY MEES, FRANCISCO TROPA & ELISABETH WILD
Curators : Fatma Cheffi and François Piron

September - October 2020.

« Generally speaking, I just pass by, I don't stay ».

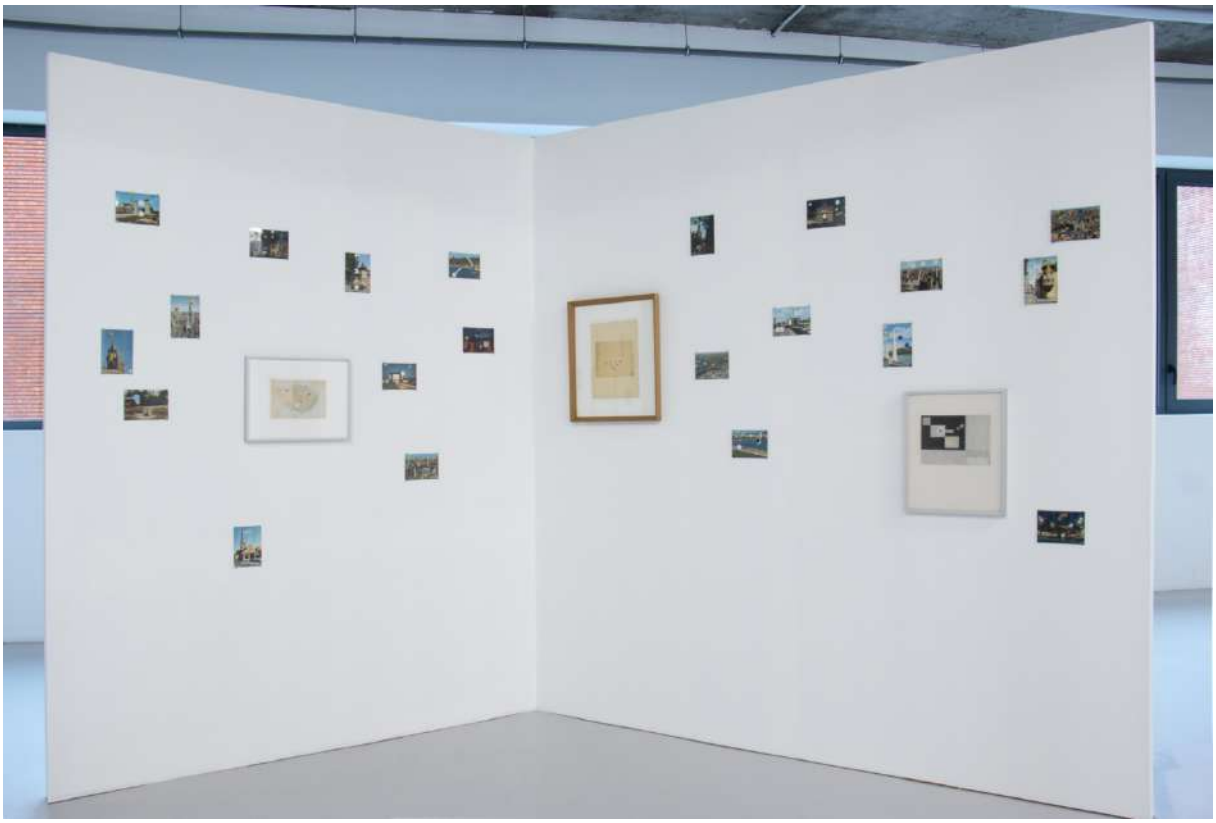
Marcelle Cahn (1895-1981)

In a film made for Radio-Télévision Suisse in 1976, Marcelle Cahn, then aged 80, set about making collages in her bedroom-studio at the Galignani foundation in Paris. On her bed, there was a mess of stickers, cut up cardboard, post cards, envelopes and assorted stationery, forming the raw materials of work reduced to utter simplicity, in which intuition and fantasy came together in a constant concern for rigour and lightness which can be found in all her work, from the cubist paintings of the 1920s up to the pictures of lines punctuated withembossed spheres, suggesting musical and graphic scores. These principles grew even stronger in these tiny collages which she made at the end of her life, isolated in her room.

The exhibition Le Plan libre [Open Plan], whose form and title have been inspired by the modernist architectural concept of eliminating bearing walls, pays homage to Marcelle Cahn's final period and places it in a dialogue with other artists, brought together here with no chronological or geographic boundaries, but for their similar attitudes and formal chimes. Like Marcelle Cahn, Ismaïl Bahri, Hessie, Georges Koskas, Guy Mees, Francisco Tropa or else Elisabeth Wild use an intimate, ludic, free approach to abstraction and artistic practice which, as opposed to fleeting enthusiasms, stands out as a vital, timeless necessity. Though Marcelle Cahn often stood on the margins, she still remained open to the currents and conversations of her time, but without ever shutting herself up in the doctrines of a school. She built up her own language independently and, in moments of doubt and danger, she encouraged other artists to develop their own.

Fatma Cheffi and François Piron, May 2020







POP/OP

SOLO SHOW

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville
May - July 2021

«Pop/Op» is focused on Marcelle Cahn´s collage work from the 1960s and 70s, which combine the Dada legacy and the purist tradition.
The exhibition is structured around a complementary display of two series, representing major axes in the artist´s output: a set of collages on postcards, created from 1972, which, according to Michel Seuphor, synthesis op art and pop art, and a set of collages on abstract compositions of printed matrixes.

The postcard collages examine « the gap between what is and what is not », to use the words of Mireille Cordonnier-Kraft from her doctoral thesis about the artist (1995, unpublished), thereby precluding the « normal play of perception », whereas the play of infinite compositions of the collages on prints lends a musical dimension to Marcelle Cahn´s work.







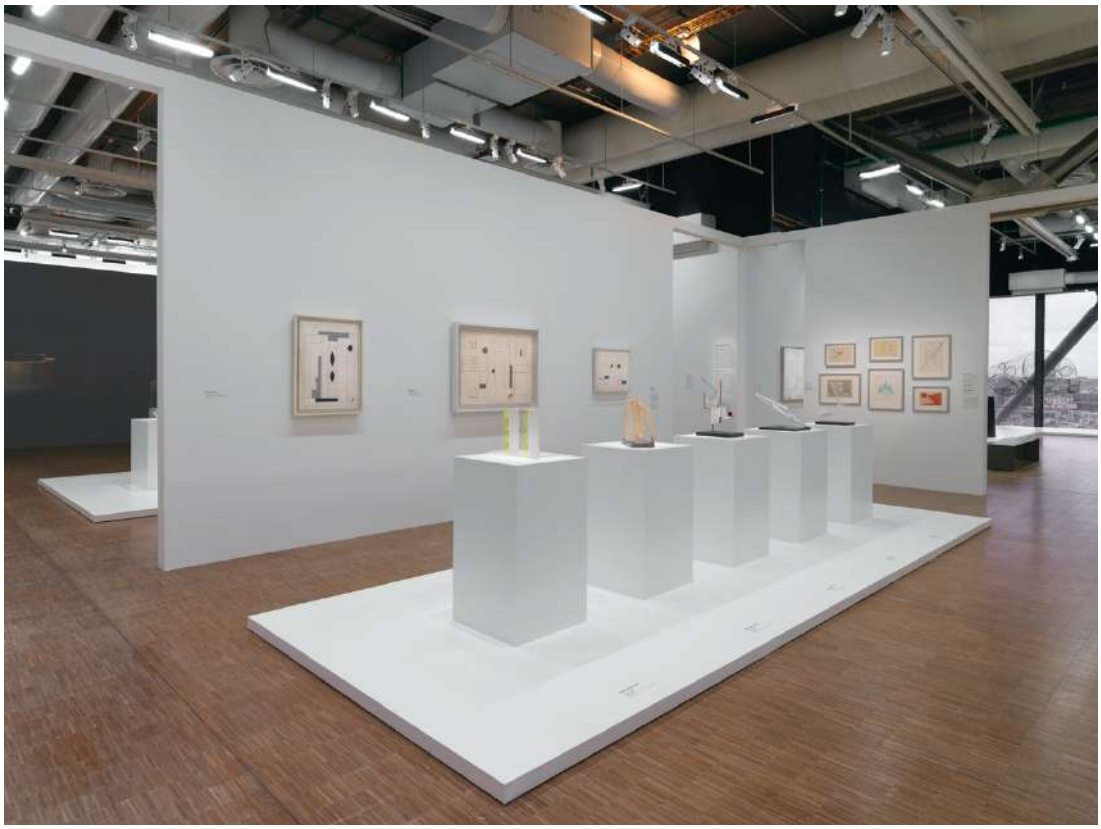
WOMEN IN ABSTRACTION

GROUP SHOW

Centre Pompidou, Paris
May - July 2021

Christine Macel, Chief Curator, and Karolina Lewandowska, Curator for Photography

The exhibition shows the decisive turning points that marked the history of Abstraction and questions its aesthetic canons without redefining a new one. It also goes beyond the idea of a history of art conceived as a succession of purely pioneering practices. By giving "women artists" a new place in this history, the exhibition demonstrates its complexity and diversity. First of all, it makes an unprecedented foray into the 19th century with the rediscovery of Georgiana Houghton's work from the 1860s, undermining the chronological origins of abstraction by tracing it back to its spiritualist roots.





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